

**Minutes of the Special Meeting
of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education
Monday, May 22, 2017
5:05 p.m.–6:30 p.m.
Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA**

Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Present:

James Morton, Vice-Chair, Boston

Ed Doherty, Boston

Nathan Moore, Chair, Student Advisory Council, Scituate

Pendred Noyce, Boston

James Peyser, Secretary of Education

Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Absent:

Paul Sagan, Chair, Cambridge

Katherine Craven, Brookline

Margaret McKenna, Boston

Michael Moriarty, Holyoke

Mary Ann Stewart, Lexington

Russell Johnston, Senior Associate Commissioner, attended the meeting on behalf of **Mitchell D. Chester**, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, Secretary to the Board

Vice-Chair Morton called the meeting to order and announced that due to the lack of a quorum, this would be considered a gathering of Board members. Vice-Chair Morton introduced Russell Johnston, Senior Associate Commissioner, who was attending on behalf of the Commissioner.

Mr. Johnston introduced the three Level 5 district receivers: Jeff Riley (Lawrence Public Schools), Stephen Zrike (Holyoke Public Schools), and Jessica Huizenga (Southbridge Public Schools). Each delivered a short presentation on implementation of their district turnaround plans, including an overview of their district's priorities, key initiatives, and outcomes to date.

Mr. Riley said his presentation would be a brief update to the presentation he made to the Board in March 2017. He stated that on June 2, approximately 750 students will graduate from high school in Lawrence, up from 586 in 2012. Mr. Riley highlighted the district's Early College Pathways program, through which Merrimack College and Northern Essex Community College will provide courses to approximately 250 juniors and seniors. He noted that many student art festivals and concerts are taking place in May and June. Secretary Peyser asked if students may enter the Early College Pathways program earlier than junior year. Mr. Riley said students currently enter at the end of their sophomore year, and there will be future discussion of having them enter in the second semester of their sophomore year. Mr. Doherty asked if the increased number of high school graduates compared to 2012 is due to population growth. Mr. Riley said while the student population has grown, the graduation rate has increased even more and is now 72%. The members thanked Mr. Riley for his presentation.

Mr. Johnston introduced Holyoke Public Schools Receiver Dr. Stephen Zrike along with Ventura Rodriguez, Director of the Department's Office of Strategic Transformation. Dr. Zrike presented demographic data on the student population in Holyoke and explained the vision for the district is a pathway for every student. He noted gains that have been made and said he is determined to accelerate the improvement based on values of encouraging bold thinking, exploring all possibilities for student success, embracing all students and families, empowering school teams to impact change, and engaging in meaningful feedback.

Dr. Zrike highlighted Holyoke's high school redesign plan. As the plan is phased in with support from the Barr Foundation, Holyoke will establish a Freshman Academy in the ninth grade, and in grades ten through twelve, students will participate in theme-based academies that would include a career-technical education component as well as college preparation. Dr. Zrike described the early success of the dual enrollment program, which had six students enrolled in SY14-15; in SY 16-17, that number has risen to 119 students. Dr. Zrike said the district is working closely with Westfield State and UMass and is pleased with the early results thus far.

Dr. Zrike highlighted the increase in the length of the school day by 45-90 minutes daily in elementary and middle schools and noted these schools have a 67% participation rate in Breakfast in the Classroom. He said the dropout rate, 5.4%, is the lowest it has been in six years, which is a significant decline but still needs improvement. Dr. Zrike said the district is working with the Massachusetts School Building Authority on planning for two new middle schools. He noted positive increases in student and teacher engagement, parent participation in educational and outreach events, and student showcases. Looking ahead, Dr. Zrike said he is focused on providing more direct leadership support to principals, increasing the quality of teaching and the cognitive demand on students, building accountability, strengthening the middle level experience, and partnering to develop better training and coaching for staff and robust mental health and social-emotional support for students.

In response to questions, Dr. Zrike said Holyoke is part of the Preschool Opportunity grant and does not yet have space or resources to implement universal K1. He said with two new middle schools anticipated, the district will gradually reconfigure grade structures. Dr. Zrike said the dual language program has received positive feedback and will expand to a second site. He said the TIP/Peck program has improved significantly. Responding to a question from Vice-Chair Morton about how schools use the extended day, Dr. Zrike said they have increased academic time, Breakfast in the Classroom, enrichment blocks, and planning time for teachers.

Mr. Johnston introduced Dr. Jessica Huizenga, who is starting her second year as Southbridge Public Schools receiver. Dr. Huizenga outlined the vision for the Southbridge schools and reviewed the district's demographics. She presented the five priorities of the district turnaround plan and discussed improvements to school climate and culture, including a new Department of Social and Emotional Learning, Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports, an advisory program for grades 6-12, and Breakfast in the Classroom. Dr. Huizenga noted that all schools now have WiFi and 1400 students and staff are working with new devices. Dr. Huizenga added that Southbridge has developed new curriculum units in grades 6-12 humanities and STEM and grades 1-5 math, and overall math results are improving.

Dr. Huizenga said the partnership with Scholastic has added 9,500 books to grades 2-5 and 500 books per middle school classroom. She reported on an English/Spanish dual language program that will start in kindergarten and grade 1 in Fall 2017. Dr. Huizenga discussed the secondary school redesign, which includes partnerships with Quinsigamond Community College, Bay Path Regional Vocational Technical High School, and Worcester State University, among others. She presented other priorities and activities including: developing effective teaching and leadership through professional development; applying evidence-informed decision making; cultivating family and community partnerships; and reallocating resources to ensure high quality management, accountability, system-wide coherence, and sustainability. Dr. Huizenga responded to questions about school climate and described reallocating funds from paraprofessional staffing to more-needed clinical services and alternative programs.

Vice-Chair Morton asked the receivers about their interaction with each other. Dr. Zrike said they confer with each other as well as with Department staff, and added that connecting their teams has been useful. Mr. Johnston said the meetings of the Urban Superintendents Network are helpful for the receivers and other district leaders to share common issues and best practices.

Ms. Noyce said she appreciated the energy and strategic thinking and she commended the receivers for tackling the challenge of secondary school redesign. She asked if the receivers believe the Department should have picked up on the difficulties of these districts sooner. Dr. Zrike said until you are there on a daily basis, you may not be able to pick up on all the systemic needs. He added that only now that he has been in this position for two years is he able to understand the depth of the issues. Dr. Zrike said the issues have been decades in the making and it will take time to turn around the district. Vice-Chair Morton thanked the receivers for their presentations and for their leadership and commitment.

Vice-Chair Morton acknowledged the audience members who were holding signs regarding Mystic Valley Regional Charter School. He invited them to submit letters to the Board and/or provide public comment at the Board's regular meeting at Scituate High School on Tuesday, May 23, 2017.

The gathering of Board members concluded at 6:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Mitchell D. Chester
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education
and Secretary to the Board